

To Dr. Mayo and the Allentown School District Board of Directors:

It is with deep regret that I rescind my acceptance of the offer made to me by the Allentown School District (ASD) to serve as Director of Communications. Although words cannot express how excited I was about serving ASD, I'd prefer to spare both the board and the superintendent any further and unnecessary embarrassment. Please accept my most sincere apology for the anxiety and tension this ordeal has already caused. I'm certain this is the last thing anyone wanted to deal with at the beginning of their summer break.

While I was tempted to speak to the media to "set the record straight," out of respect for the school board and superintendent, I didn't want to cause even more damage. I have not been able to trust the media to hear or accurately share my side of the story for eight years and I knew I wasn't going to be able to do that now. Nor am I ever going to be able to change what was in that report – right or wrong.

However, if I may, I'd like to take this opportunity to help clear up why I perhaps made the questionable decision not to bring up the ethical issue at my interview – it was truly a 50-50 struggle.

Yes, during my tenure at a previous school district there were questions about ethics – some justified, others open to interpretation, none criminal. I do NOT deny that like everyone, I've made some decisions that at the time seemed appropriate but later were questioned as to their ethics. In this case, I paid dearly. The biggest debt however, was what I had to pay in lost credibility.

It was perhaps wrong of me not to share this information up front in my interview. I did wrestle with it, especially because I was back in Pennsylvania. However, this ordeal was traumatic to say the least. It dealt with issues that are now eight to ten years old. Criminals of real crimes pay shorter and lighter sentences. It is hard to relive the embarrassment and humiliation of a report that was taken out of context and somewhat skewed by investigators to the point of reporting items that were exaggerated, hearsay or just plain false. While some of the erroneous items were in fact acknowledged, albeit after the fact, and resulted in a reduced fine (that was still quite unfair), it did not change verbiage in the report! In other words, the commission did myself and my attorney a favor by reducing the fine, but saw no reason to go back in and change the facts in the report – despite the price I would continue to pay in credibility and humiliation because this would always be a public record.

So when I am faced with a decision to relive this ordeal or keep it in my past, my tendency is to want to move on from it. I've paid for that speeding ticket, why do I have to keep paying for it? It's in my past. That may be wishful thinking, but I'm human. And like all humans, I made a decision based on emotions. The National Inquirer-style writing of that report angers every fiber of my being. As a state office with so much authority, no one sees a need to check or even second-guess the facts the Ethics Commission puts in writing. It is preposterously unfair. Legally, I could not afford to fight it then, and unfortunately, I cannot afford to fight it now – though I'd love to! So, the commission's facts will remain fact as I continue to pay the painful price.

Again, I ask for your forgiveness for my wanting to keep my private issues, private, but when I walked into ASD and met Dr. Mayo, it was the freshest breathe of air I had felt in a very long time. As I did my research and read about what seems to be a developing and well-deserved renaissance for ASD, I could

not bear the thought of derailing this win-win opportunity. A renaissance for an urban school district – been there, done that and have the data to prove it.

After all ASD has been through in the past several years, I believed – and still believe – it is well-positioned to become the example of how urban education *can* work! The timing, the vision of the school board, the leadership of Dr. Mayo and the remarkable assembly of the new leadership team, make this an exciting time to be a part of ASD. I wanted nothing more than to share in that excitement. Sadly, I cannot.

Again, I am deeply sorry for the inconvenience and anxiety this has caused. I wish nothing but success for ASD.

Respectfully,

Keith Pierce, APR